



## **PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET**

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# **Conjunctivitis “Pinkeye”**

### **What is conjunctivitis?**

Conjunctivitis (pinkeye) is an infection of the eyes. It is most often caused by a virus but can also be caused by bacteria. Conjunctivitis is a mild illness and is not dangerous. Sometimes conjunctivitis is not caused by an infection but rather from some type of irritant.

### **What are the symptoms of conjunctivitis?**

The white parts of the eyes become pink or red. The eyes may hurt or feel itchy or scratchy and may produce lots of tears and sticky drainage. In the morning, the drainage may make the eyelids stick together.

### **How is conjunctivitis spread?**

The infection that causes some types of conjunctivitis is spread when infected drainage from an infected person’s eye gets into someone else’s eye. This can happen when someone rubs his eyes, gets drainage on his hands and then touches someone else (or touches an object). If other people get this infected material on their hands and then touch their own eyes, they can become infected. Conjunctivitis can spread easily among young children because they often rub their eyes and then touch others without washing their hands.

### **How is conjunctivitis treated?**

Healthcare providers may prescribe an antibiotic eye medication just in case the conjunctivitis is due to bacteria.

### **How can you prevent conjunctivitis?**

Good handwashing can protect you against conjunctivitis and many other diseases. Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water. Because the eye discharge on objects can remain contagious, do not share clothing and other personal items, including eye makeup applicators.

### **What should you do if you have conjunctivitis?**

- Keep your eyes wiped free of discharge. Gently use paper tissues, and throw them away promptly.
- **Always thoroughly wash your hands after touching your eyes.**
- Teach your children to wash their hands, especially after wiping their eyes.
- Ask your healthcare provider if you need to receive eye medication.
- Be sure to wash anything that touches the person’s eyes (such as washcloths, towels, toys and cameras). Do not share towels, washcloths or other personal items.

**For more information, please contact  
Boston Public Health Commission  
Communicable Disease Control  
(617) 534-5611 or [www.bphc.org](http://www.bphc.org)**